

Hydro celebrates Basslink birthday

Cable keeps the lights on

PHIL BECK

TASMANIANS would be hit by power restrictions and blackouts this winter without Basslink in place, Hydro Tasmania chief executive Vince Hawthorth said yesterday.

Reviewing the first year of Basslink, Mr Hawthorth revealed that Tasmania imported more than four times the amount of electricity it exported during the period.

"The first year of Basslink operation has highlighted its importance in drought-proofing the state," he said.

"It has also avoided the possibility of power restrictions this winter as a result of the current drought and declining hydro storages."

In cash terms, Tasmania's prolonged drought cost Hydro Tasmania an additional \$75 million on importing power and gas to keep electricity supplies running during Basslink's first year of operation which ended on Saturday night.



BENEFIT: Vince Hawthorth, first year highlights drought-proofing value.

Although Hydro Tasmania has absorbed the additional costs, Mr Hawthorth said they would impact on its annual financial result.

Hydro storages yesterday stood at 18 per cent — the lowest since April 1988 when they fell to 14.2 per cent. The Great Lake storage stands at 12 per cent.

Mr Hawthorth said that without Basslink:

- The storages would be 6 per cent lower than they were currently.
- Tasmania would face power rationing and potential blackouts this winter.
- The Great Lake would be virtually emptied of useful energy with

little or no prospect of being refilled for many years to come.

● Hydro Tasmania would be paying for much greater quantities of gas to compensate for ongoing low lake levels at a generally higher cost than Basslink imports.

"Basslink has been critical in keeping the lights on in Tasmania at a time of severe drought and following 10 straight years of below-average rainfall," Mr Hawthorth said.

Basslink managing director Bill Russell said the 360km electricity link between Victoria and Tasmania had achieved more than 99 per cent availability.

During the first year Basslink supplied 1900GWh to Tasmania and 450GWh to the National Electricity Market. The net import of 1450GWh is equivalent to 70 per cent of Tasmania's annual domestic consumption.

National Grid, the owner of Basslink, is negotiating to sell the asset.



Basslink